RE: Durango Herald inquiry
Peter Butler to: Sabrina Forrest 07/22/2011 03:35 PM

From: "Peter Butler" <butlerpeter2@gmail.com>
To: Sabrina Forrest/R8/USEPA/US@EPA

Looks good Sabrina. I discussed several of these issues with Dale last night.

-----Original Message-----
From: Sabrina Forrest [mailto:Forrest.Sabrina@epamail.epa.gov]
Sent: Friday, July 22, 2011 3:07 PM
To: Dale Rodebaugh
Cc: butlerpeter2@gmail.com; Kay Zillich; Brent_Lewis@blm.gov; Jennifer Lane; mylott.richard@epa.gov
Subject: Re: Durango Herald inquiry

Hello Mr. Rodebaugh, Thank you for your patience. I appreciate you sending me your questions via email. It makes it much easier to send clear responses, which are below.

I will be on personal leave from July 25-29, and on Agency travel from August 1 - 5. If you have any questions, you may reach me via email or phone beginning August 1; however, I won't be able to respond until evenings after our meetings have ended.

1. The Animas River Stakeholders Group in 1994 apparently initiated a valid enough response to the possibility that most of San Juan County could become a Superfund site to STALL DELAY POSTPONE the designation. Why is the EPA looking at the Gladstone area now?
Since water treatment at Gladstone ceased, metals concentrations and loads in upper Cement Creek have increased. These increases appear to be impacting fisheries downstream on the Animas River.

2.When did revisiting the Silverton area (Gladstone) begin?
EPA, the ARSG members, and San Juan County began revisiting Gladstone in 2004, shortly after water treatment stopped. We first looked at what might be required for installation of an updated water treatment plant and the county looked at possible ways to fund a treatment plant. We later got support from the Bureau of Land Management, the EPA's Office of Research and Development, and landowners for a pilot demonstration involving a small scale water treatment technology (Ionic Water Technologies Rotating Cylinder Treatment System [RCTSTM]) in upper Cement Creek. The goals were to see if the technology, used at high altitudes and under challenging conditions, would reduce metals concentrations in the water and would also produces less sludge than would a traditional lime feed active water treatment plant. We also hoped to see if RCTSTM would help reduce metals loading so that Animas River surface water quality standards could be met at downstream Animas River segments. This pilot showed that such a technology could be successful. However, this technology still generated sludge. Sludge generation typically requires land area for settling ponds, and also a management plan for sludge disposal. Since the ARSG still lacked data from mine discharges in upper Cement Creek, EPA, with ARSG member review, input, and support developed a sampling plan that we started implementing in May 2009. That sampling is scheduled to be completed in 2011.

3.Why?

Water treatment ceased and metals concentrations increased. Additionally, increased flows were being observed in higher elevation adits.

4.You said you take soil and water samples. How many and where?

From 2009 to present, EPA, BLM, and volunteers have sampled water from about 13 to 30 locations during the routine water sampling events. The numbers of locations are typically the same; however, access is dependent on weather and avalanche danger during certain times of the year. Last fall, EPA, through their Superfund Technical Assessment and Response Team (START) contractor, collected 14 soil samples from mine waste piles, five samples from discharging adits, 51 surface water and 51 sediment samples. They were analyzed for metals, and soils/sediments were also analyzed for polychlorinated biphenyls.

5. What do the samples reveal?

Presently the data are still draft and EPA is developing the presentation of our findings for the August 18 meeting in Silverton.

6.At your August visit to Silverton. do you present facts, make recommendations, debate merits of approaches to solutions,,issue orders?

EPA will present: data, how we use the data, options for solutions that could involve EPA resources, and CERCLA process. We hope it will foster good discussion.

7. Can the EPA designate a Superfund site by its own authority?

No, we require state input and concurrence and also recognize that the best solutions won't happen or be supported without the community's input.

8. Do local commissioners (government) or state officials have to agree to Superfund status?

That is preferable and is part of the community input and support that EPA does seek. Often, local governments provide letters of support to the governor that request EPA to list a site on the National Priorities List (NPL).

9. What does Superfund status require on part of local authorities or volunteer groups?

Every step of the Superfund process includes opportunities for community involvement. Please see: http://www.epa.gov/superfund/community/process.htm

After a site is listed on the NPL, there are more formal requirements to ensure the community has a voice in the cleanup remed (ies) selected. For example, there are resources, such as $50,000 technical assistance grants, that can help communities hire the technical expertise to help translate the reports and other information at the Superfund site so that the community understands the data or information and can have an educated voice in the process. See: http://www.epa.gov/superfund/community/tag/index.htm

10. Does the EPA participate in remediation measures.?

At NPL sites, yes. At voluntary cleanup sites, not always.

11. Are costs of remediation shared?

Under Superfund yes, but the cost sharing has to be evaluated for

each site and this depends on whether there are responsible parties to help with the costs of cleanup. EPA tries to work cooperatively with those who have generated or transported waste, as well as owners and operators of sites. The state also contributes to Superfund cleanups; although they are primarily responsible for the operations and maintenance of remedies after the cleanup is complete.

12. Among what entities?
See above.

13. Can you give examples of remedial measures?
Alternatives must be evaluated for each site, but for mine waste piles, they are sometimes moved to a better location then covered with clean soil. Controls are also installed to address surface water run-on and run-off. If a more suitable location can't be found, then they are sometimes capped in place with run-on and run-off controls installed. Mine discharges involve many more factors, but frequently involve some type of water diversion, water treatment, and/or closure/bulk head to keep the metals-laden water from getting to the streams and rivers.

14. How serious a case is the Gladstone area? AVERAGE EGREGIOUS BASKET CASE?
The water quality degradation is serious enough for EPA to want to help find a solution that all stakeholders can get behind.

15. What is the worst case (where) you've seen in similar mining communities?
There are thousands of inactive or abandoned mines impacting watersheds and they have to be looked at site-specifically. Since, I am not familiar with all the sites in our six state region, I can't adequately answer your question.

Sincerely,

Sabrina Forrest
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From: "Dale Rodebaugh" <daler@durangoherald.com>
To: Sabrina Forrest/R8/USEPA/US@EPA
Date: 07/20/2011 06:25 AM
Subject: Durango Herald inquiry

Dale Rodebaugh
reporter
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970.375.4564

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Thanks for your patience, Sabrina.

Dale